DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 144 236 95 EA 009 947

TITLE	School Consolidation: Is Bigger Better? Part I. Options in Education, Program #89.
INSTITUTION	George Washington Univ., Washington, D.C. Inst. for Educational Leadership.; National Public Radio, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY	Carnegie Corp. of New York, N.Y.; Corporation for Public Broadcasting, New York, N.Y.; National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	29 Aug 77
NOTE	22p.; For a related document, see EA 009 947
AVAILABLE FROM	National Public Radio--Education, Washington, D.C. 20036 ($1.00 for Programs No. 89 and 90)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Consolidated Schools; *Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; *One Teacher Schools; Rural School Systems; *School Size; School Systems; *Small Schools; *Social Change
IDENTIFIERS	Options in Education

ABSTRACT

This publication is the complete transcript of a weekly radio program devoted to contemporary issues in American education. This particular program is the first of two that focus on the topic of school consolidation. In separate segments of the program, a teacher and students drill in a one-room school in Indiana; a long-time rural school teacher and superintendent discuss the pros and cons of one-room schools; author Jonathan Sher discusses the myths of rural school district consolidation; parents, teachers, and students from Monhegan Island, Maine, discuss the island's one-room school; author Jonathan Sher discusses the advantages of small schools; Minnesota representative Bruce Anderson and students from rural Minnesota high schools discuss the viability of school consolidation; Philadelphia school system administrator Ann Bush discusses the trend toward consolidation; author Jonathan Sher and Thomas Shannon of the National School Boards Association discuss the ideal size for a school; the teacher/principal and students of a California one-room school discuss the advantages of one-room schools; and Urie Bronfenbrenner of Cornell University discusses school size as it relates to school-community alienation. (JG)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED144236

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

OPTIONS IN EDUCATION

PROGRAM TRANSCRIPTS OF
A WEEKLY SERIES BROADCAST BY
MEMBER STATIONS OF
NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO

EA 009 917

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J Meeraw

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND THE ERIC SYSTEM CONTRACTORS."

A CO—PRODUCTION OF NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO AND THE INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP OF THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY. PRINCIPALLY FUNDED BY THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. ADDITIONAL FUNDS PROVIDED BY THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND THE CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK.

Program #89

SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION: IS BIGGER BETTER?
Part I

August 29, 1977

"Copyright © 1977 by National Public Radio
& The Institute for Educational Leadership"

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1-2
CONSOLIDATION OF SCHOOLS	2
CONNOR PRAIRE, INDIANA, 1836 - Marsha Langdon and tourists	2
HONEY CREEK SCHOOL - Teacher Mary Fiskus and students	3
MRS. ALPHA HART LEWIS RECALLING HER 51 YEARS IN EDUCATION	4
THE MYTHS OF RURAL SCHOOL AND DISTRICT CONSOLIDATION - Jonathan Sher, Author	5-7
MONHEGAN ISLAND'S SCHOOL - Peter and Raquel Bermer, parents; Sandra Dixon, chairwoman of the school committee; Dorcus Butler, Monhegan School teacher; and Kellinee Kundi, former Monhegan Island student	7-10
ADVANTAGES OF SMALL SCHOOLS - Jonathan Sher, author	10-11
IS CONSOLIDATION A VIABLE APPROACH?- Bruce Anderson, Minnesota representative and Minnesota students	11-12
IS THE TREND TOWARD MERGERS OVER? - Dr. Ann Bush, an administrator in the Philadelphia school system	12
IDEAL SIZE FOR A SCHOOL - Jonathan Sher, author and Thomas Shannon, Executive Director of the National School Boards Association	13
SPENCER VALLEY SCHOOL - Clare Troxell, Spencer Valley School Teacher/Principal and students	14-15
HOW DO WE CHANGE SCHOOL-COMMUNITY ALIENATION - Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner, Cornell University	16

"IS BIGGER BETTER"

PART I

BLAIR: From National Public Radio in Washington, this is OPTIONS IN EDUCATION.

FISKUS: People just don't understand what the one room school did. They don't realize that you got educated. Maybe not as much, but you got educated. You learned to read and to write and to spell and to cipher.

RAQUEL BERMER: One of the nicest things that go on here are the community events that take place in the school house, a Valentine party, a Christmas play, and sometimes Halloween. And, it's a lovely thing to see everyone sitting in the school house wooden chairs, being entertained by whatever the children have prepared with the teacher or teachers, as we've had in the past.

PETER BERMER: Still with oiled clothes on, whatever you're doing you just stop. The guy who was running the oil truck has got oil all over him, he sits down. It's really neat.

BUTLER: We want them to get the feeling of what life in general is like everywhere, and not to feel that they're separate.

STUDENT: Next year I'm going to come back, I tell ya. If mom doesn't let me, I'm gonna walk!

* * *

MERROW: Remember the one room school house? You probably don't unless you heard your parents talk about their school days.

BLAIR: That's right! The one room school house with grades 1 through 12 or at least 1 through 8 has gone the way of suspenders and buggy whips. Forty-five years ago there were 150,000 one room schools, and today there are only 1,500 left.

MERROW: Like just about everything else in America, schools have gotten bigger. But, are they better? That's the question. I'm John Merrow.

BLAIR: And I'm Wendy Blair, and this week and next week too, we're going to try to figure out whether bigger schools really are better.

MERROW: It's an interesting paradox. There are fewer students and fewer schools, but individual schools are getting bigger. Thousands and thousands of schools are being closed every year, and yet we'll have to build 123,000 new classrooms every year till 1980, if we want to have enough space for all the students!

BLAIR: It all has to do with population shifts, consolidation, educational theory and, perhaps above all, money.

* * *

SHER: The schools served as a unifying force in the community and as a real community institution.

BUTLER: We don't always have the things we need. I just have to pull on my own knowledge, magazines, and try and work it together. It's really pretty good, for a one room school house.

SHER: I'm not trying to make the argument that small rural schools are perfect institutions and that they're without fault. I don't think there's any point in being as extreme on the other side as some of the consolidation advocates were in pushing bigness.

SHANNON: A smaller school aids in identification. A youngster feels that he or she has a piece of the action, a proprietary interest in the success of that school.

SHER: There aren't a lot of other kinds of institutions in rural communities. They don't have art galleries, and many communities don't have movie theaters. In that sense, it was a classic case of a reform which was done to communities rather than by communities.

CONSOLIDATION OF SCHOOLS

MERROW: Let's start with consolidation, which simply means the merging of several schools into one, or the merging of several school districts into one larger district. Since 1930, for example, 99% of the one room schools have been consolidated. In that same year, 1930, there were 128,000 school districts. Today, there are only 16,000.

BLAIR: Supposedly, we saved money by consolidating, but today that view is being challenged by scholars and citizens who believe small is beautiful and maybe less expensive. It's not easy to separate fact from nostalgia though.

CONNOR PRAIRE, INDIANA, 1836

MERROW: Let's try by going back to the beginning, to the one room school. If you lived in Connor Praire, Indiana in 1836, this is what school might have sounded like:

TEACHER: We have a lot of learning to do in a short time and I am taking over for the school master that was here last year. Now, I've heard tell some things about him and I'll try not to repeat 'em. Now, I know some of you have never been to school before, and if you don't know how to read, that's nothing to be ashamed of. But, I'm hoping by the time that you leave our class that you will have that kind of learnin' in ya. I will start everyday with a proverb; and today's proverb I've written on the board is "Wisdom is greater than riches." Now let's repeat that out loud together.

STUDENTS: Wisdom is greater than riches.

TEACHER: That's real fine!

* * *

MERROW: Reporter David Horning of member station WBAA in West Lafayette, Indiana, recorded the teaching performance of Marsha Langdon in that recreation of the one room school in Connor Creek, Indiana. Each "class" of tourists spends 12 minutes in the school.

BLAIR: That's for tourists. But there a few school districts which have reopened one room schools to give today's students a better feel for the past. These are experiments in which young people actually attend the school for a few weeks or perhaps longer. Margaret Joseph reports on one such school, also in Indiana.

HONEY CREEK SCHOOL

TEACHER AND STUDENTS SINGING: Here we are at Honey Creek School, here we are at Honey Creek School, here we are at Honey Creek School, skip to my lou, my darling.

JOSEPH: Honey Creek School is a living look at the past. From its ancient bell atop the building to its rope swing under the big tree in the yard, it beckons youngsters to come and experience a bit of "days gone by." Teacher Mary Fiskus, who herself went to a one room school in Indiana, believes that Honey Creek is preserving something worthwhile about America.

FISKUS: People just don't understand what the one room school did. They don't realize that you got educated. Maybe not as much, but you got educated. You learned to read and to write and to spell and to cipher.

JOSEPH: And learn to cipher they do at Honey Creek. Mrs. Fiskus drills the class in arithmetic relentlessly starting with simple addition.

FISKUS: Lay your needles down, I don't want to see anyone sewing during this period, and we're going to have some oral arithmetic like we had the other day. And, we've been practicing on these facts so you should know them. This time I'll just bounce back and forth, from side to side, like we did before, and you will give me the answers. This side first. Zero plus two.

STUDENTS: Two.

FISKUS: Two plus one.

STUDENTS: Three.

FISKUS: Three plus zero.

STUDENTS: Three.

JOSEPH: Teaching methods contrast sharply with those used today. We asked some students if they thought they learned as fast as in regular schools, and this answer was typical.

STUDENT: Faster, really. They learn these huge addition things when they're in first grade only, makes you a little queasy, you know, when you're in the fifth grade.

JOSEPH: Even recess is different as this fourth grade girl explains.

STUDENT: They don't need to have all the playground equipment. Mrs. Fiskus our teacher, she makes us organize our own games. She taught us a lot of games. She makes us decide what we're going to play.

JOSEPH: We asked some of the students if they wanted a chance to be part of Honey Creek again, and this is what one little girl said.

STUDENT: Yes! Definitely! Definitely! Next year I'm gonna come back, I tell ya. If mom doesn't let me, I'm gonna walk!

TEACHER AND STUDENTS SINGING: Skip to my lou, skip, skip, skip to my lou, skip, skip, skip to my lou, skip to my lou my darling.

BLAIR: That report for OPTIONS IN EDUCATION from Margaret Joseph of member station WFIU, Bloomington, Indiana.

MERROW: That school reopened in 1976 after 6 years of restoration and planning. Ironically, just 9 years before, in 1967, there were one room schools still operating in the area.

BLAIR: The real reduction in numbers of one room school houses began much earlier.

MERROW: Consolidation, closing several small schools to create one big one or merging several school districts to create a big one,began in earnest in the 1930's. But, it's still possible to talk to people who taught in one room schools.

* * *

MRS. ALPHA HART LEWIS

LEWIS: The older children, the eighth graders would help the little ones. I had one boy that was such a wonderful, wonderful boy, that we had one little girl who came to school -- she'd learned to cuss at home, boy she cussed just like a sailor -- and Jack would say to her, "Now, Patty, we don't do it that way." And he broke her from doing that.

BLAIR: That was Mrs. Alpha Hart Lewis, who began teaching in a one room school in 1912. She also served as school superintendent from 1943 to 1951, and during those 8 years she closed half of the county's 64 schools. All of the schools she closed were one room schools. Reporter John Bisney asked her to recall some of the reasons for closing them.

LEWIS: One reason would be the movement of the population from the country to the city. The amount of money each school district got according to the number of pupils, there wasn't enough money left to provide a first class school. It's the trouble with these smaller ones even, with the 5 or 6 districts have trouble in getting enough money to operate the kind of school that they'd like to have.

BISNEY: How did it affect the education, do you think, moving from the smaller one room houses to the larger schools?

LEWIS: Well, there's no question but what there's advantages and also some disadvantages. Now, the advantages was that they could have better qualified teachers, which was important because they get paid more money.

BISNEY: What about the disadvantages?

LEWIS: The disadvantages, the little children, I think, they're finding that out now that the smaller children learn from the larger ones, when they were all operating in the same room.

MERROW: Mrs. Alpha Hart Lewis recalling her 51 years in education, with reporter John Bisney of station KBIA, Columbia, Missouri.

BLAIR: Mrs. Lewis said that lack of money was one reason one room schools were closed. There were two other arguments: the education would be better in a bigger school, and two, the school administration would be more efficient.

MERROW: The pressure of those arguments led to the consolidation, or merging, of school districts and the closing of small schools. Many state legislatures passed laws either requiring consolidation, or making it attractive financially; for instance, states would often pay for building big, new schools.

BLAIR: Now, however, the conventional wisdom that "bigger is better" is under attack by a number of educators including Jonathon Sher and Rachel Tompkins. Drs. Sher and Tompkins have written a report called, "Economy, Efficiency and Equality: The Myths of Rural School and District Consolidation."

THE MYTHS OF RURAL SCHOOL AND DISTRICT CONSOLIDATION

SHER: I should note that it was very hotly contested and very bitterly fought in almost every rural community. In that sense, it was a classic case of a reform which was done to communities, rather than by communities. It was a reform which was endorsed, sponsored, instigated, applauded and carried out by state level policy makers, by leading educational theorists, and by the education administrators throughout the country. It was not something which local citizens wanted, and it's something which they tried very hard to prevent.

MERROW: I talked with Jonathan Sher recently about consolidation, and about the arguments for it, economy, efficiency and better education, which he says are myths.

SHER: When the educators argued that it would save money, they really weren't being very fair in their analysis. They totaled up all the savings and then neglected to total up all the extra costs that would be associated with the consolidation movement. So they would argue that it has to be less expensive to only operate one furnace in one school building than it is to operate 4 or 5 furnaces in 4 or 5 buildings.

MERROW: And that's correct.

SHER: And that is correct.

MERROW: What do they leave out?

SHER: What they forgot were things like the enormous costs associated with increased transportation. That's probably the single most important factor in consolidation. Kids who used to walk now had to ride buses. Kids who used to ride buses for 5 miles, now were finding themselves riding for 20 or 30 or 40 miles one way to get to school. This, of course, meant new bus purchases, higher operating costs, faster depreciation, you had to hire new bus drivers, and all and all it became an enormously expensive proposition.

MERROW: Are you saying that the school people, the professionals deliberately left this out of the equation, or were they so hell-bent on consolidating that they just forgot to think about that, or what?

SHER: I think that it's very much a case of people being advocates instead of researchers. Our impression from reading volumes upon volumes of research studies was that they weren't interested in finding objective answers to these kinds of questions. They had a set of beliefs, and they were determined to marshal whatever evidence they could in whatever form they could in order to convince people to adopt this reform.

MERROW: One of the other arguments that you say is a myth is that about efficiency. Consolidation of districts and of schools was pushed because it would theoretically be more efficient. Now why is that a myth?

SHER: I think that efficiency is often confused with economy. For example,

the kind of efficiency that was most often discussed was administrative efficiency: that a superintendent would only have to report to one school board instead of many school boards and that some of the administrative jobs could be eliminated. But, what we found was that while it's true that you would have less administrators, you also found that those administrators were responsible to a much larger population of parents, teachers and students. And, I think it can be argued that while it may have cost less money, they were getting less services, and that's not efficiency, that's called "less services for less money." For example, 2 years ago in the state of Vermont the State Department of Education proposed a massive school consolidation. They proposed eliminating more than 270 existing school districts and replacing them with some very small number. They at one point suggested 8 school districts instead of 278. There's no magic number or magic benchmark. But, it does seem that in those kind of dramatic instances that you're getting far less, even though you may be spending less.

MERROW: There are so many more administrators today than there were, say in 1930 or 1940. Is consolidation, in some way, a cause of that rapid growth in the administrative "team."

SHER: Well, two things happened, which are kind of amusing to note. One being the fact that in many cases, because of the political circumstances, whenever a consolidation occurred, where for example there had been 3 superintendents, the politics were such that in the new consolidated district, you had one superintendent instead of 3; but then that new 1 superintendent turned out to hire 2 assistant superintendents, who just happened to be the former superintendents from the districts. So, even though you can say that it was a change from 3 superintendents to 1, all 3 people were still hired and were still working as administrators.

The other thing that happened is that as schools became larger and districts became larger, problems could no longer be handled in the kind of personal way that rural people had come to expect and come to treasure. Instead, they had to be handled in a bureaucratic fashion like the large urban schools they were trying to imitate. And, so you had to hire a whole level of supervisors. So, suddenly there were people employed by the school system who had little, if any, contact with children and whose jobs were to service other professionals, curriculum coordinators and personnel specialists, and the other trappings of urban school systems came to the country. And, so instead of ending up with less administrators, we found that increased size demanded the hiring of more administrators.

MERROW: The other myth, what you call myth, has to do with better performance by students, better teachers, that whole idea. Now, why is that a myth?

SHER: The thing that you have to remember in listening to that kind of argument is that the relationship between the educational "inputs"as they're called, such as the credentials of teachers, the number of courses, the number of books in the library, that relationship between "inputs" and the actual "outputs," like student performance, or how well students do once they leave school are very tenuous. I think that it's an important thing to remember that the fact that you have so-called better things going into the system doesn't mean that better students will come out of it.

Yeah, I'm not trying to make the argument that small rural schools are perfect institutions and that they're without fault. They certainly need to be improved.

MERROW: You are pushing "smallness." I mean, there's a kind of ...I have a sense that if "bigness"was the thing to be in favor of 20 years ago, that today "small is beautiful"and here is Jonathan Sher and a number of other people arguing that big schools are <u>ipso facto</u> big problems, and "small is

beautiful." Is that so?

SHER: I think to a certain extent that's so. I don't think there's any point in being as extreme on the other side as some of the consolidation advocates were in pushing "bigness." I do think that small schools tend to have certain kinds of advantages that have been overlooked for too long.

BLAIR: Jonathan Sher, co-author of a new study arguing that bigger isn't necessarily better and that small rural schools have educational advantages. We'll hear more from Sher later in the program.

MERROW: Forty-five years ago there were 150,000 one room schools. Today, 99% have disappeared, and there are only 1,500 left. One of them is on Monhegan Island, a small island off the coast of Maine. Bill Legere reports on the one room elementary school there.

* * *

MONHEGAN ISLAND'S SCHOOL

LEGERE: Monhegan is a place apart from even the smallest towns on the mainland, there is no central electricity, just a few gasoline generators and many oil lamps. There are no private telephones, just a couple of pay stations. There are few cars, mostly just a few well-worn trucks which haul supplies over the several miles of dirt road. And, the one room school has no library, no audio-visual center, no cafeteria, and no gymnasium. In fact, it has no running water in the winter. And, like other buildings on the island, it too must depend on a portable generator for any electricity. It might seem to the casual observer that the kids of Monhegan are at a terrible disadvantage, but most people, parents and children alike, agree that they would never trade situations with any "mainlander." Peter and Raquel Bermer explain why they chose Monhegan as the home for their 3 children.

PETER BERMER: In normal society we can hide all the things that are not nice for the children to see: somebody's sick, somebody dies, there's an alcoholic, but it's not that way here. They really do live with it. And, out here, it's quite all right to have real differences with people, but there are no locks on the doors....

RAQUEL BERMER: There are very few. . .

PETER BERMER: Yeah, well, they're coming in now, but that's a fading way. Out here the essence of life is based on trust, not on a veneer quality of whether somebody's nice or not.

RAQUEL BERMER: The nicest things that go on here are the community events that take place in the school house. Many of them are triggered by the calendar year: a Valentine party, a Christmas play, sometimes Halloween, and it's a lovely thing to see that without a written mandate. In fact the island stops, and you'll find everyone sitting in the school house wooden chairs being entertained by whatever the children have prepared with the teacher or teachers as we've had in the past.

PETER BERMER: Still with oil clothes on, whatever you're doing, you just stop. The guy who was running the oil truck has got oil over him, he sits down. It's really neat. The only thing you don't want to do is get caught not being there.

LEGERE: But the Bermers' and other parents are quick to acknowledge that there have been and still are some problems for the 70 or so people who choose to live out the winter on Monhegan. Last year, for example, the recently enacted school funding law in Maine almost put the Monhegan school out of

business. Because property on Monhegan is valuable, the town paid out about $30,000 in tax money to the state's Education Fund; but under the state's school funding formula which is based on the number of students, Monhegan got back only $11,000. That was just enough to pay the teacher, with a little left over to operate the school. Sandra Dixon, the chairwoman of the school committee voices the townspeople's frustration over the situation.

DIXON: It was a very impersonal sort of bureaucratic treatment. More than half of the taxes raised for education went off the island to other places, and it's hard to explain that to any of the voters out here. They say why, why is their money going to other schools when we haven't got enough for our own, and all you can say is that's the law.

LEGERE: But this year, the main legislature recognized the plight of small school districts, such as Monhegan and amended the school funding law to remedy the situation. Now, towns like Monhegan get an annual appropriation equal to 5/3's of the average elementary school teacher's salary. That, according to Monhegan residents is just enough to pay the teacher and operate the school.

This problem with the state, however, threatens to resurface in other forms. For example, another state law mandates school hot lunch programs. But the Monhegan School doesn't even have running water in the winter, and all the island homes are within a few minutes walk of the school. Moreover, people on Monhegan say that having the family together at lunch time is part of their way of life. But, the state isn't the only obstacle to keeping the school open. Sandra Dixon says that finding someone qualified and willing to teach on Monhegan is a problem.

DIXON: Well, last year, when we were looking for a teacher, we had 52 applications in two weeks. However, we interviewed 12 people who seemed most qualified and they were not impressed with the salary, they were not impressed with the living conditions, housing is very limited in the winter time, and generally houses out here don't have, except for the fishermen's houses, but most other houses that would be for rent don't have running water, and sometimes they're quite chilly. And, so it turned out that of these 12 people who came for their interviews, or maybe it was only 8, only 1 decided that this was what she really wanted to do.

LEGERE: That teacher is Dorcus Butler. She took the position a year ago September after just one visit to the island.

BUTLER: It's just that I always wanted to teach in a one room school house, and I applied, and we came out and things just sort of fell in place.

LEGERE: And you'd never seen the island?

BUTLER: Never seen the island, never knew anything about it.

LEGERE: Was it difficult for you to fit into the community here?

BUTLER It takes a while for somebody from no one knows to walk in and be a part of it.

LEGERE: But, how does one teacher manage to teach 9 grade levels at one time. Butler says she depends on volunteer teacher aids, individual study programs, and some assignments that all 9 grade levels can work on.

BUTLER: Sometimes the little ones get lost and other times the older ones think it's too babyish, we've got to kind of have to work in between.

LEGERE: Do you feel at all hampered by the lack of all of the facilities that

a school system on the mainland would have: a full library, an audio-visual center, all of that. How do you work around that?

BUTLER: I just have to pull on my own knowledge and magazines, and try and work it together. It's really pretty good for a one room school house. I think the big thing is that when they get to here and they're in the same room for 8 years, by the time they've been to 6 or 7 years here they've gone through all the material and they've said well I've read all that, all the books, there isn't anything left I haven't read, which comes up with problems. Each year you have to try and renew it, and that's been hard this year because we haven't had the money to do it with.

LEGERE: Do you tailor the studies to match them to experiences that the kids would have here on the island.

BUTLER: We did a unit on energy conservation and we mentioned then that a lot of people here have generators and they don't worry about saving electricity because when the generators are on, the idea is to have as many lights on as possible to keep the generator working at its full capacity. So, the concept of turning off the light bulb really doesn't apply on energy saving. So, that was brought out then. But, we did visit, one person did have a windmill at the time here, so we went there; and there was a time when one of the seine boats tipped over and sunk, and we all went down to see them right it. And, on "trap day" when they took the traps out, one of the boys was excused from school because he works during "trap day" the full time. And, I did go down and then we did write a paper on "trap day," a few things like that come out. I try to de-emphasize it, because I want them to get the feeling of what life in general is like everywhere and not to feel that they're separate.

LEGERE: That's another problem on Monhegan. Since the school offers no high school program, 15 year-olds must leave the island to attend high school on the mainland. That means attending either a private boarding school, or staying with friends or relatives while attending public school. Either way, the state pays only the public school tuition. Parents must cover any additional costs, including the higher tuition costs of private schools and the boarding costs. Beyond the financial hardship, however, is the emotional hardship of leaving the tightly knit island community and fitting into a larger school. Kellinee Kundi is one of the Monhegan School's recent graduates. Last year she left the island to attend a private high school on the mainland. She said the adjustment wasn't easy at first.

KUNDI: I was really scared! There was another girl there who comes from another island called Islesford, and, well, we stuck together a lot; and she helped me in some problems and I helped her on other ones, and we finally made it through.

LEGERE: Were you at all behind in what you had learned in the school here, behind the kids who had been to school on the mainland?

KUNDI: Yeah. A lot. I was taking German and that was hard too cause I had never been taught my English language like, so I had to learn them in German, I didn't even know them in English.

LEGERE: If it's OK to ask a personal question at the end, I suppose there weren't very many boys here your own age on the island when you were going to school here.

KUNDI: No, there was only Chris.

LEGERE: Was that hard getting used to having a lot of boys your age around?

KUNDI: Yeah, cause I didn't know how to act or anything, and I just like got really embarrassed in front of them a lot and everything. But at the end of the year it was a lot easier. It's helped me a lot in being friendlier, going to school. Then you had to talk to people and everything.

LEGERE: Kellinee Kundi talking about the transition from a one room school to a private school on the mainland. Kellinee is one of 5 or 6 Monhegan kids who will be leaving the island again this September to go to school on shore. Some younger children say they don't want to leave the island to go to high school, but according to their teacher, by the time they've reached the eighth grade, most are ready for it. Leaving for high school is one of the facts of life on Monhegan, where people have chosen to trade off electricity, shopping centers and schools with gyms and swimming pools for intimacy, neighborliness, fresh air and the complete lack of fear of crime and violence.

For OPTIONS IN EDUCATION this is Bill Legere in Bangor, Maine.

* * *

BLAIR: That report suggests some of the pressures on school districts to consolidate. It's hard to attract highly qualified teachers to small schools, particularly in rural areas. And, state laws often make consolidation an offer that a district can't refuse.

MERROW: But there are advantages to remaining small as well: close personal relationships for one. Jonathan Sher, author of a new book, Education in Rural America, describes what he feels are other advantages of small schools, particularly if they're in the country, not in the city.

ADVANTAGES OF SMALL SCHOOLS

SHER: Schools have a function in a rural setting which is somewhat different than that in urban areas. There aren't a lot of other kinds of institutions in rural communities. They don't have art galleries. Many communities don't have movie theaters, or other kinds of cultural institutions, And the schools served as a unifying force in the community and as a real community insititution. And, when that institution is wrested from the community, it ruptures in some way the fabric of community life. What we're arguing for, and what rural people have argued for for decades and decades now, is to be able to create an educational system which reflects their values, which reflects their lifestyles and which reflects their interests.

MERROW: Ok, now you're a persuasive advocate and you argue with facts and figures that the arguments for consolidation were in fact wrong; nonetheless, I have a sense that perhaps you are "spitting into the wind" or in some way trying "to hold back the tide," whatever the proper expression is, because consolidation is continuing. There are pressures for consolidation, desegregation, I suppose, is one, and the arguments about economy are another. Isn't that correct? I mean aren't there places where consolidation is running amuck.

SHER: There are places where it continues to be a major battle.

MERROW: Where?

SHER: In West Virginia at the moment, consolidation is a big concern. In The mid-western states like Iowa and Nebraska and Minnesota, it seems to be a perpetual kind of concern. Every year there are bills put before the state legislature recommending that schools be consolidated. For example, in the state of Iowa, in this past year, there was a major fight when originally a panel recommended that the existing districts be eliminated and replaced by county units, and that created such an uproar that they said ok, not county

units, all school districts having less than 1,000 kids. And that created such an uproar that it got changed to 600 kids, and then finally got changed to 300 kids and then finally it was tabled for the year and no action was taken.

MERROW: Well now you're telling a story about a victory. But, now are the victories happening frequently, or is consolidation being stopped?

SHER: Consolidation is no longer a theory, it's no longer a "newfangled" reform. People in rural communities have had experience with this reform now and in many instances, have expressed their strong dissatisfaction with the results. So, they're not basing it, as consolidation advocates claimed for many years, on some kind of emotionalism or wild-eyed fears. Rural people have seen what happens in those schools, have seen what happens to their community, what happens to their children. And they're saying that they don't want that anymore.

BLAIR: Jonathan Sher, author of Education in Rural America and co-author with Rachel Tompkins of a study of school consolidation.

* * *

MERROW: You're listening to National Public Radio's OPTIONS IN EDUCATION. We're talking about schools. Is bigger better? We've been talking about school consolidation, the merging of several small schools into one larger one. But school districts have been consolidated as well. In 1930, there were 128,000 school districts, and today there are 16,000. Again the reasons were and are: economy, efficiency and education. In southwestern Minnesota, schools are being pushed into some type of consolidation or cooperation at a steady rate. Most school districts in the region are declining in enrollment each year. Now since the amount of state funds depends on the number of students, these rural districts are faced with yearly cuts in state funds. That means they need more local money just to stay even, and that means higher local taxes. Some districts with 100 students or less are on the verge of closing their schools.

BRUCE ANDERSON

ANDERSON: Whether consolidation is a viable approach, I question that, especially in the rural areas.

MERROW: Vicki Sturgeon of KRSW in Worthington, spoke recently with Minnesota representative Bruce Anderson who represents a district where consolidation is a pressing issue.

ANDERSON: You take that institution out of that community and there goes your community. It's like breaking the link in the chain. You take that focal point of pride, you take that center focus, you take that economic link out of the community, and you're talking about the destruction of the community. I've seen many towns lose their school and just dry up and go away. I mean they just turn into "ghost towns" virtually. And, people know that, they've seen it happen before, and that's why they cling so desperately on to their schools.

STURGEON: In recent years, there have been an increasing number of bills before the Minnesota Legislature advocating various forms of consolidation. So far, rural legislators have been able to defeat the more drastic proposals. But back in their own districts, the decrease in state money which accompanies any decline in enrollment has already forced several schools to close. While some parents are still opposed to consolidation, the students who are actually affected, seem to have accepted the change.

* * *

STUDENT: People were just stubborn. There were a few of them that were for it and a few of them that were against it. Some people are just not for changing things. They just wanted to keep it the same all the way till the doors were closed down.

STUDENT: It was like almost all ties were severed and all new ones were begun.

STUDENT: People I think are more stubborn than anything. You know, just the idea of having our own school, and since -- well different communities used to press us too: "You should close and you should come to our school." So I think for that reason too people really got up in arms and decided "we're going to keep our own school" and "we're going to show them," and that type of attitude.

STUDENT: We were going to lose so many classes, and they wouldn't be able to hire teachers. And this year, my principal called me up and the class schedule was just fantastic, all the more classes he had to offer this year. And I was really pleased, it makes my senior year a little bit more enjoyable.

* * *

MERROW: Those were students from various high schools in rural Minnesota talking about consolidation with Vicki Sturgeon of member station KRSW in Worthington, Minnesota.

BLAIR: The most persuasive arguments for small schools seem to be educational ones. They're friendlier and with today's technology, new resources can be brought to children. The children don't have to be bused many miles to the resources. The most persuasive arguments for consolidation, on the other hand, are economic. Land and construction are expensive, and so is the duplication of special programs. Incidentally, desegregation has been found easier in bigger schools. Reporter Deborah Hamilton talked with Dr. Ann Bush, an administrator in the Philadelphia school system about school district consolidation, and she asked Dr. Bush whether the trend toward merger was over, particularly in the northeastern United States.

DR. ANN BUSH

BUSH: Well I think we do reach a point of critical mass, where we get diminishing returns when school districts are inordinately large. The reduction of the number of school districts in the state of Pennsylvania, I think, was a wise move: that some consolidation was worthwhile. We can provide centralized services, or deliver services on a centralized basis perhaps in some areas which would be more "cost effective" than if we didn't have smaller or rather more consolidation.

BLAIR: Dr. Ann Bush of the Philadelphia school system talking with reporter Deborah Hamilton of station WUHY. In fact, consolidation battles will be waged across the United States, but particularly in the middle west.

MERROW: Sixteen thousand may sound like very few school districts in a country with 47 million school-age children, but nearly 30% of the school districts have fewer than 300 students; and another 26% have between 300 and

and 1,000 students. That means that over half of the nation's students are in school districts with fewer than 1,000 pupils.

BLAIR: What is the ideal size for a school? We asked Jonathon Sher and Thomas Shannon, the Executive Director of the National School Boards Association. First Tom Shannon, then Sher.

IDEAL S. E FOR A SCHOOL

SHANNON: I think its a matter of local history, past practices, the expectations of the local community, all of these things are involved.

MERROW: What we're seeing right now is a kind of "small is beautiful" concern, and I wonder if this is another swing of the pendulum from the "bigness" and the arguments for efficiency and economy and so on. Now, there seem to be a lot more people saying let's keep those small schools. Those small schools may not be the most efficient, but their better educationally. Is that just a sentimental, emotional kind of thing?

SHANNON: No, I think that there is a very definite feeling for small, smaller schools that is, because of the discipline situation, and parents continue to be concerned about discipline in the schools. In a positive way, a smaller school aids in identification, a youngster feels that he or she has a piece of the action, a proprietary interest in the success of that school. And, so, to dismiss it as a passing fancy or a fad, I think, would be a mistake. But exactly how small the school should be, again, is a matter that I think depends upon the local situation.

SHER: Well, in many ways the search for the correct number has been education's version of the search for the Holy Grail. I don't think that it's something which we will ever know, because I don't think its something that's knowable. I think that it depends a great deal on the particular circumstances in the communities you're talking about. It may be that in a relatively, densely populated area, where there are lots of children in a small physical space, that a school of several hundred, or maybe even a thousand kids is a reasonable kind of school to have, depending again on the nature of the community. However, in many rural areas to gather together several hundred or a thousand kids into a school, or even into a school district involves bringing together enormous chunks of land and consequent kinds of troubles; and kids can't be transported 3 and 4 hours a day in order to go to school. It seems to me that as a general rule, that small classes in small schools in small districts have advantages which need to be taken seriously; and for too long they have not been taken seriously. I think it's an advantage where teachers really know the students and really know the families that they come from; and can be a help, not only during the established hours of school, but where the teachers and the adminis rators are part of the community themselves, and have an ongoing educational role to perform.

BLAIR: For his part, Sher would like to see state legislation that requires consolidation repealed, and the decision left up to local communities instead. He also would like legislatures to create support systems for small schools: that is give small schools special treatment.

Thomas Shannon of the National School Boards Association agrees with Jonathan Sher that communities should decide on how large their schools will be.

MERROW: Near San Diego, California, a community has decided to keep a one room school in full operation. Peter Hamlin reports:

SPENCER VALLEY SCHOOL

HAMLIN: That bell has signaled the close of school for many years in a small community near Santa Isabel, C fornia, about 50 miles northeast of San Diego. The bell sits atop the Spencer Valley School. The only operating one room school house in San Diego County. The school district is 100 years old. The centenniel was recently celebrated; and the school building itself goes back to the turn of the century. And, nestled down from the road in this picturesque mountain community, behind a row of giant cedars that almost hide it from view, the Spencer Valley School couldn't look more like our storybook image of a one room school house. There's no clue that it has recently been extensively rebuilt to meet California's new earthquake standards. And, the school operates much as it might have years ago. In fact, parents of many of today's students attended the school, or taught there. Clare Troxell, the present teacher/principal, says there is a strong sense of tradition and respect for the school that has been passed on to her present pupils. Clare Troxell has been teaching at the school for one year. She's always had an interest in working at a one room school house, and says most of the advantages there center around the fact that 9 grades, kindergarten through 8th grade are all together.

TROXELL: The children feel very comfortable with each other. For example, I have had 6th and 7th grade boys who have stood up and said: "I made up a song on the way to school. Could I please sing it Mrs. Troxell?" And, you know, I'm just astounded, and of course, it's marvelous, because I've worked with kids this age and I've never seen a class of peers where anyone would dare to stand up. It takes a most unusual child who'd be willing to stand up and perform. I've seen 6th and 7th grade boys do ballets with the girls outside. They'll get together and perform a little skit, all ages, and feel very comfortable about this. No peers, well there are some peers but, the sophistication isn't there -- if you call it sophistication -- the kind of thing where we folk dance and you see someone who's 3 feet smaller dancing with someone who's 3 feet taller. And, they feel so comfortable, and there's no laughter or giggling about how funny that looks. It just isn't present.

HAMLIN: How do the different ages, the range of ages, how does that play a role in the education process?

TROXELL: One of the things I've always believed in is "cross-age tutoring," and along with individualized and multi-grading and all these things that just happen here, that you don't set a program up for. "Cross-age tutoring" simply means that somebody is having trouble and feels comfortable to ask someone else. The older children, and I just can't stress this enough, what an asset these older kids are, and I don't mean just in terms of relieving me from duties, but I mean in terms of modeling and parenting for themselves. It just happens the little kids will ask somebody else, not always an older one, sometimes it's a peer, and the older ones very often will notice that someone's having problems and just automatically go help. The only trouble that I have with that, and I do have mixed feelings, is that there's a noise level attached to it. I know there is, I think, often the thought that with a multi-graded situation that, OK it's great for the young ones cause they're moving upward, but what's happening to the older ones. It's downward mobility. And I think that really depends on the teacher, to keep those children motivated, to help them find their levels and to always aspire for higher ones.

HAMLIN: The one room school house does sent a variety of advantages as an educational situation, but there are problems. One is certainly not unfamiliar to teachers in larger districts -- overcrowding. Class size at the Spencer Valley School is reaching into the upper 20's, putting an increasing strain on the teacher both in the classroom and in the amount of accompanying paperwork for planning and administration.

TROXELL: There was definitely a romantic idea that I had about the children and Mrs. Troxell and the one room school house and the little valley with all the apple trees surrounding; and yes, you could drive by and say, yes that's what's happening. And yet, there are children with special needs. I'm feeling like I'm going to go back for more education. I want to know how to deal with them more effectively. There are new things that I could do with them and I don't want to have my head in the sand at all. A school house, a school district, a teacher, children have to grow and change too, so I don't want to keep it as such. There's something very special I want to keep: many of the traditions, and I think those are the things you remember so much as a child. You want to keep a lot of traditions, and I've found myself,you know wondering about well now, what could really be changed, that I'm not tampering with something that's very special and sacred. And, I often have to really think about that, and I probably don't always make the right decision.

HAMLIN: What emerges in talking with Clare Troxell is the feeling that with all the benefits of a good old-fashioned one room school house, one cannot ignore recent developments in education, which to a large extent have been made possible by size, and the luxury of being able to afford programs for specialized needs.

And there's also the inevitable, growth, reaching even our more remote areas. I asked Clare Troxell if the one room school house is doomed to extinction, or if she thinks some of the strong points of this system can be preserved, even as a community physically outgrows it.

TROXELL: I really do, and more and more, I'm thinking about that. Because in our community, a development is happening and eventually 80 homes will be in that development and this one room school house cannot possibly support children from those homes. I think one of the -- and we may be a two school house district, or a two room, or something like this. We are going to have to face the growth and that's something that I had to come to terms with myself because at first I resented it and thought, "What's happening! This is going to destroy our school here." And, it is going to happen, and I do feel that we can still preserve many of the things. One of the things that I feel so strongly about is our kindergarten through 8th grade classroom. And I feel that if you have even more than one school, as I would definitely feel like the children from all ages ought to be together. And I think that could still happen, even if we had two buildings.

HAMLIN: Clare Troxell, teacher/principal of the Spencer Valley School. The only operating one room school house in San Diego County.

* * *

CHILD: The smaller schools are kind of funner. In the bigger schools there's more kids in there and the teacher always doesn't get to help you all the time.

CHILD: Well, you're all together and you get, you're more friendlier than anything, you know. You usually -- it's almost like a big family or something and you can play with a lot of the younger kids like if you like, you know, like taking care of them, so it feels neat to take care of them on the playground and to watch out if their OK and all that.

HAMLIN: For OPTIONS IN EDUCATION, I'm Peter Hamlin.

MERROW: We've heard the views of several people on who should decide what size a school should be, the state or the local community. Well, Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner of Cornell University has another vision of school size and of what should happen in schools.

DR. URIE BRONFENBRENNER

BRONFENBRENNER: Classroom sizes are going up, school sizes are going up, American schools are very interestng institutions now. They're compounds outside the community in which there's no regular commerce with the community, to get there you have to go on a special bus and have a special status. It's not even a public bus. And, they are the breeding grounds of alienation. The schools are the focus, the major focus in our society for vandalism and violence. Every school now has a security budget and we keep trying to control it. I can't, what I'm going to suggest here, I can't say will work because it hasn't been tried, and that's one of the problems; we're not trying social inventions in this regard. We're still trying to think up some magic gadget that'll teach kids to read rather than try to establish a context in which children who are even taught badly will learn to read; because they're motivated and that's what they want to do; they feel supported in that activity.

For some years, I've been advocating what I call a "Curriculum for Caring." And a "Curriculum for Caring" would begin not in the junior high school, oh no, it'd begin much earlier in the elementary grades, in the primary grades. And what this means is -- it's not a curriculum about caring, it's a curriculum in caring -- it means that young children would have responsibility for caring for someone who mattered. Young, very young children, for example in People's Republic of China, one of the most impressive things for those of us who were on a visit there saw, was that the very young children have responsibility for the care of the old: for bringing pleasure to their lives, taking care of them, you know, keeping them company, singing and dancing and reading to them and so on. Children can perform that role very effectively. And, as the child gets older, there can be responsibility for the care of younger children. There can be concern. There can be visits to the sick, to the lonely, to the and so on. And I see this as not being done just within the school or even as has been suggested as some of us who've been involved in the Head Start Program have all reserved that Head Start Centers should be near high schools. That's a step in the right direction. But what I would like to see is that the school children go out of the school into the community where there are people who need caring. Into the nursing homes and so on, and this would require supervision. Now, the teachers can do that, they're already overburdened. What does this mean? It means we have to bring children and adults into each others lives so that a child ... Today it is now possible for a person to graduate from high school at the age of 18 in the United States without ever having had to do a piece of work on which somebody else depended. I'm not saying having to do a piece of work, but having to do a piece of work on which somebody else depends.

MERROW: You're saying schools are "make work."

BRONFENBRENNER: Well, schools, I'm not just saying about schools, I'm saying that the life of the teenager. If it has work in it, it's "make work."

BLAIR: Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner of Cornell University in New York State. John talked with him at a recent conference on child development.

MERROW: You may have noticed that during this hour about small schools, we haven't told you how many pupils there are in the typical elementary school or high school. There are two reasons for this: one, there's really no such

thing as a typical school size, because the range is so great from 10 or 15 students to well over 2,000. But also, nobody pays much attention to national trends in school size. Teachers care about class size, and administrators care whether or not the school is full.

BLAIR: But, if you really want to know, the average school had 445 students in 1969. In 1973, the average school had 512 students.

MERROW: In a word, fewer students in bigger schools with more teachers, and they're all part of larger school districts. Consolidation continues despite the efforts of some scholars and local citizens.

BLAIR: But, ironically, we're building new schools and new classrooms in many areas because of population shifts.

MERROW: And consolidation of another kind is occurring, but under a different name and for different reasons. It's called, plain and simply, school closing. And it's happening because of declining enrollments. There are not as many students as there used to be and so there are a lot of what school administrators like to call "underutilized educational facilities," that is empty space.

BLAIR: Next week on OPTIONS IN EDUCATION we'll take a look at the agonizing process of closing a school, and at what it can do to the neighborhood.

MERROW: We hope you'll join us.

* * *

FISKUS: People just don't understand what the one room school did. They don't realize that you got educated. Maybe not as much, but you got educated. You learned to read and to write and to spell and to cipher.

R. BERMER: One of the nicest things that go on here are the community events that take place in the school house, a Valentine party, a Christmas play, and sometimes Halloween. And, it's a lovely thing to see everyone sitting in the school house wooden chairs, being entertained by whatever the children have prepared with the teacher or teachers, as we've had in the past.

P. BERMER: Still with oiled clothes on, whatever you're doing, you just stop. The guy who was running the oil truck has got oil all over him, he sits down. It's really neat.

BUTLER: We want them to get the feeling of what life in general is like everywhere, and not to feel that they're separate.

STUDENT: Next year I'm going to come back, I tell ya. If mom doesn't let me, I'm gonna walk!

* * *

MERROW: Reports for this program came from Bill Legere, WMEH, Orono, Maine; David Horning, WBAA, West Lafayette, Indiana; Margaret Joseph, WFIU, Bloomington, Indiana; Deborah Hamilton, WUHY, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Peter Hamlin, KPBS, San Diego, California; Vicki Sturgeon, KRSW, Worthington,

Minnesota; and John Bisney, KBIA, Columbia, Missouri.

BLAIR: If you'd like transcripts of this two-part series on school consolidation, "IS BIGGER BETTER?" send $1.00 to National Public Radio -- Education, Washington, D.C. 20036. Ask for Programs No. 89 and 90, and tell us the call letters of your NPR station.

MERROW: You can also get the two cassettes for $10.00. The transcripts of the two-part series cost $1.00, the cassettes, $10.00. Here's the address again: National Public Radio -- Education, Washington, D.C. 20036.

OPTIONS IN EDUCATION is a co-production of National Public Radio and the Institute for Educational Leadership of The George Washington University. Principal support is provided by the National Institute of Education. Other funds are provided by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

BLAIR: OPTIONS IN EDUCATION is written and produced by John Merrow and Jo Ellyn Rackleff. The assistant producer is Katharine Ferguson. Technical assistance by Bob Knock.

I'm Wendy Blair.

MERROW I'm John Merrow, and this is NPR, National Public Radio.

* * *

MUSIC CREDIT: Jaj Mahal -- "Oh So Good in Blues"; "Buckdancer's Choice"; "Railroad Bill" -- KC32600, Columbia.